

IN THE DRAWINGS:

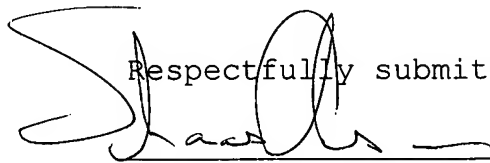
Please amend Figures 1-8 as indicated in the replacement drawings in attached Appendix E.

REMARKS

Prior to examination on the merits, please cancel claim 1 without prejudice, please add claims 2-8 as indicated in Appendix D, please amend the specification as indicated in Appendices A, B, and C, and please amend Figures 1-8 as indicated in the replacement drawings in Appendix E.

CONCLUSION

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that the present application is in condition for allowance, and an early indication of the same is courteously solicited. The Examiner is respectfully requested to contact the undersigned by telephone at the below listed telephone number, in order to expedite resolution of any issues and to expedite passage of the present application to issue, if any comments, questions, or suggestions arise in connection with the present application.


Respectfully submitted,

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APPENDIX A

This patent application is a continuation patent application of U.S. Patent Application No. 09/921,300, filed August 3, 2001, which is hereby incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

APPENDIX B

Difficulties are often encountered when a disabled person transfers from one location to another whether independently or assisted. Particularly in the case of wheelchair-bound persons or persons with severe mobility impairments, it is often quite difficult to lift and transfer persons to and from their wheelchair when entering or exiting a motor vehicle.

Additionally, persons who are semi-ambulatory may have difficulties entering or exiting vehicles which are substantially higher or lower than the level required for comfortable entry or egress.

APPENDIX C

Referring to FIGS. 1-2, there is shown a lifting and transferring apparatus 10 in accordance with the present invention in two respective positions. Beginning from the bottom of the apparatus 10 upward, the apparatus 10 includes a horizontal l-support member 36 secured by three mounting tabs 44 for securely mounting the apparatus 10 to, for example, the floor 37 of a vehicle or other structure. It should be noted that an important feature of this l-support member 36 is that its structure is located adjacent to common vehicle seat-mounting stud locations, allowing for convenient placement of mounting tabs 44 such that vehicle seat-mounting studs would protrude through an aperture in mounting tabs 44, thus eliminating the need for drilling and other custom modifications to the vehicle and mounting structure. The apparatus 10 also includes a gusset 34 to stabilize the main vertical support 32 which, in turn, supports two mounting tabs 26 and 27 (obscured due to view) that serve to support the electrically-actuated extension arm 24. The electrically-actuated extension arm 24 may, ~~[alternatively an dependent]~~ depending on the constraints of the vehicle into which the lift is being installed, be attached to ~~[the]~~ a side wall of the vehicle via mounting tabs 26 and 27 in certain applications rather than to be supported by a frame support structure as depicted in FIG. 2.

The lengthening/shortening of the assembly of extension arm 24 [~~and 22~~] with inner member 22 is controlled by a control unit 28 and a motor assembly 30, which can be a direct-drive electric motor and gear assembly or, alternatively, a hydraulic power pack. The inner member 22 is movable in a telescoping manner relative to the extension arm 24 with inner member 22 supported by extension arm 24. An important feature of the apparatus 10 is that the electric motor 30 comprises a manual crank to allow for emergency operation under conditions of power or equipment failure. For the hydraulic power pack version of motor assembly 30, a hydraulic release valve is incorporated for the same purpose.

At this point it should be noted that, although FIGS. 1-2 show the extension arm 24 positioned at a 30 degree angle with respect to a horizontal axis, other angles are also possible. Additionally, the fore/aft orientation of extension arm 24 may vary considerably from the depicted fore/aft inclination angle of 15 degrees, again depending on the specific requirements of a particular vehicle application.

The lower end of inner member 22 has a support axle 21 for securely supporting a [~~horizontal~~] pivoting support member 20. Additionally, cam 18 allows [~~horizontal~~] pivoting support member[~~-~~] 20 to rotate in excess of 90 degrees from a substantially horizontal orientation, as indicated in FIGS. 1,

3, 4, 6, and 7, through a substantially vertical orientation, as indicated in FIGS. 2, 5, and 8 [~~and FIG. 3 and 6~~], by means of positional detents at each extremity of the desired motion.

It should further be noted that [~~, for vehicle applications where~~] the pivoting action made possible by support axle 21, to allow [~~horizontal~~] pivoting support member 20 to pivot from a substantially horizontal orientation to a substantially vertical orientation, [~~is~~] may not be desirable or possible, given the constraints of a particular vehicle application. In this case, [~~horizontal~~] pivoting support member 20 can be permanently affixed to inner member 22.

It should be further noted that, for vehicle applications where space constraints or desired interior layout make this a requirement, the lifting and transferring apparatus 10 may be constructed such that extension arm 24 and its support frame may be located in a position forward of the vehicle original seat, rather than rearward, as depicted in FIGS. 1-8. Such a lifting and transferring apparatus 10 would, in effect, be rendered as a mirror image of FIGS 3-8, mirrored along the horizontal axis.

It should be further noted that, for vehicle applications where space constraints or desired interior layout make this a requirement, the lifting and transferring apparatus 10 may be constructed such that seat 16 and [~~horizontal~~] pivoting support member 20 would be located to the right of the vehicle original

seat, rather than to the left, as depicted in FIGS. 1-8. Such a lifting and transferring apparatus 10 would, in effect, be rendered as a mirror image of FIGS 1-2, mirrored along the horizontal axis.

~~[Horizontal]~~ Pivoting support member 20 is attached to seat 16 via two hinges 38 to allow seat 16 to pivot about a substantially horizontal axis when ~~[horizontal]~~ pivoting support member 20 is in a substantially horizontal orientation or about a substantially vertical axis when ~~[horizontal]~~ pivoting support member 20 is in a substantially vertical orientation.

Referring to FIGS. 3-5, there are shown side views of apparatus 10 in three respective stages of operation through the entry/exit sequence. Locking pin 40, working in conjunction with cam 18, allows ~~[horizontal]~~ pivoting support member~~[-]~~ 20 to rotate in excess of 90 degrees from a substantially horizontal orientation through a substantially vertical orientation as indicated above. It should be noted that locking pin 40 incorporates a tensioner spring whose purpose is to maintain pressure on the locking pin 40 along the upper surface of cam 18 in order to insure [a] positive engagement with detents at both the horizontal and vertical positions of ~~[horizontal]~~ pivoting support member 20.

FIG. 3 incorporates a front side-view detail drawing of the safety arm upright support 14, ~~[barrier]~~ safety handle 12 and

locking pin 52. Upon deployment, safety arm upright support 14 is pivoted along the horizontal axis of safety arm horizontal support axle 48 until its structure contacts stop gusset 58. Subsequently, the user would rotate [~~barrier~~] safety handle 12 along a substantially horizontal axis through [~~barrier~~] safety handle support axle 62 from the substantially vertical position within safety arm upright support 14 through a 270-degree arc to a substantially horizontal resting position. This action, due to the cam-shaped end of [~~barrier~~] safety handle 12, provokes a downward movement of safety handle locking pin 52, forced by spring 50 and guided by two safety handle locking pin guides 54, through an aperture in safety handle detent pad 56 thus immobilizing safety handle [~~14~~]12, and activating safety handle limit switch 60. The safety handle limit switch 60 is electrically tied to motor assembly 30 in such manner that the motor assembly 30 will not operate unless safety handle limit switch 60 is activated. The passive locking pin feature and safety handle limit switch 60 [~~is an~~] are important features of the [~~safety arm~~] present invention, due to the fact that any other design which relies on user intervention to assure a proper locking action is subject to user error, and potential harm to the user if the user fails to deploy the safety [~~arm~~] handle, or if the safety [~~arm~~] handle should release during the entry, exit, or transfer processes.

It should be additionally noted that, for vehicles in which the safety handle is not feasible due to space or layout constraints, it can be replaced by a seat belt attached to the seat and incorporating a limit switch which allows motor assembly 30 to be activated only when the belt is secured. This feature, although it can be defeated, provides a measure of security to ensure that the user does not fall from the seat while the lift is in motion.

FIG. 4 incorporates a detail drawing of the seat vertical stow lock mechanism 42, which rotates about axis 64. Once seat 16 has been rotated to a substantially vertical position along the axis of hinges 38, in preparation for movement of ~~[horizontal]~~ pivoting support member 20 towards its horizontal detent, it is useful for reasons of safety and convenience to secure the seat in a substantially vertical orientation while the ~~[horizontal]~~ pivoting support member 20 is being rotated, and while the vehicle is in motion. This feature is particularly important in vehicles where clearance between the left side of the seat back and the innermost surface of the b-pillar is tight, requiring precise alignment of seat 16 and safety arm and handle assembly 12 and 14 during the rotation process.

In summary, some of the unique aspects of the present invention are listed below. One unique aspect includes the

location of the extension arm mechanism behind the seat rather than underneath the seat or underneath the vehicle which facilitates easy installation, and which allows for an outward motion when there are obstacles such as sill plates, seat belt hardware, rocker panels, trim panels, and running boards. This is very important for high vehicles such as four wheel drive vehicles. The location of the extension arm mechanism behind the seat also allows for compound angles of descent/ascent incorporating varying degrees of vertical and horizontal components to facilitate avoidance of components of the vehicle structure such as the forward edge of the B-pillar.

Another unique aspect includes the location of the extension arm mechanism within the passenger compartment so as to avoid structural modifications to the vehicle where the extension arm mechanism and/or the structure of the lift must pass through the vehicle structure. In contrast, most prior art devices require substantial chassis modification.

Another unique aspect includes the foldaway feature at the joint between the platform support bar and the vertical extension arm, which allows the platform and platform support bar to be rotated completely away from the from the driver's compartment, thus eliminating any possible concern about impact between user and equipment in case of an accident.

Another unique aspect includes avoiding expensive door

panel modifications and elimination and/or modification of seat trim panels.

Another unique aspect includes the integrated safety arm and handle assembly interlock system, which takes a passive approach. That is, if the user deploys the ~~[arm]~~ safety handle at all and puts any kind of weight on it, it is positively locked in position. Additionally, if it is not properly deployed, the lift will not work at all. This is important in terms of liability end-user safety. Alternatively, if this can't be done, due to space or other constraints, a belt may be used, which must be secured in order for the lift to function. The primary advantage of this system is safety, in that it would be impossible for the user to fall from the seat while using the lift due to the interlocks.

Another unique aspect includes the cam-style design of the ~~[barrier]~~ safety handle and all of the mechanisms of the safety~~[-]~~ handle, including the integration of the safety handle limit switch into the motion of the safety handle locking pin.

Another unique aspect includes the design of the ~~[horizontal]~~ pivoting support member locking cam 18.

Another unique aspect includes the uniqueness of the support mechanism ~~[subset, it]~~ which can be integrated with factory seat bolts, thus greatly reducing installation time and hassle.

Another unique aspect includes the seat vertical stow lock mechanism. Without this, it would be very difficult to rotate the horizontal support and seat assembly backwards, and the seat would be flapping around as you drove if it were not secured.

The present invention is not to be limited in scope by the specific embodiments described herein. Indeed, various modifications of the present invention, in addition to those described herein will be apparent to those of skill in the art from the foregoing description and accompanying drawings. Thus, such modifications are intended to fall within the scope of the appended claims.

APPENDIX D

2 (New). A lifting apparatus for transferring a user to and from a seat of a vehicle, the apparatus comprising:

a mounting and support assembly for attachment to a chassis of the vehicle;

an extension arm assembly supported by the mounting and support assembly such that the extension arm is located substantially behind the vehicle seat; and

a transfer seat supported by the extension arm assembly for directly supporting a user;

wherein the extension arm assembly is operative to raise and lower the transfer seat such that the transfer seat may be positioned substantially level with the vehicle seat.

3 (New). The apparatus of claim 2, further comprising:

a support member attached between the extension arm assembly and the transfer seat.

4 (New). The apparatus of claim 3, wherein the support member pivots about a substantially horizontal axis between a substantially horizontal position and a substantially vertical position.

5 (New). The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the transfer seat

pivots about a substantially horizontal axis when the support member is in its substantially horizontal position and about a substantially vertical axis when the support member is in its substantially vertical position, such that the transfer seat pivots between a substantially horizontal seating position and a substantially vertical stowed position when the support member is in its substantially horizontal position.

6 (New). The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the transfer seat is modular and removable.

7 (New). The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the vehicle seat is located adjacent a doorway of the vehicle.

8 (New). A lifting apparatus for transferring a user to and from a seat of a vehicle, the apparatus comprising:

a mounting and support assembly for attachment to a chassis of the vehicle;

an extension arm assembly supported by the mounting and support assembly such that the extension arm is located substantially in front of the vehicle seat; and

a transfer seat supported by the extension arm assembly for directly supporting a user;

wherein the extension arm assembly is operative to raise

and lower the transfer seat such that the transfer seat may be positioned substantially level with the vehicle seat.